

Testimony of Sandra Lee
In Support of HB 6941: AAC State Agency Interpreter Services
Before the Human Services Committee
March 17, 2015

Good afternoon, Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Markley, Representative Wood, and Members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Sandra Lee. I work as an Interpreter in the DORS Interpreting Unit, and am a member of AFSCME Local 2663, of Council 4 AFSCME.

I am here to ask for your support on House Bill 6941: An Act Concerning State Agency Interpreter Services.

I think we can all agree that State Agencies can have a profound effect, either positively or negatively, on residents of their state. Agency personnel are tasked with the responsibility to gather all pertinent information, then make decisions based on said information regarding individuals and families on a daily basis. When those residents are Deaf, the information gathering may require the utilization of an Interpreter. If that Interpreter is not qualified to work in that setting, the information used to make that decision can become suspect.

It is imperative that we provide Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents with quality interpreting services. The process of interpreting is complex. Interpreters need to not only have an understanding of the context of the situation, he or she must have the trust of the client(s). Every Interpreter is not a match for every Deaf or Hard of Hearing client.

The staff of DORS knows our Deaf community. Great care is taken when assigning interpreters to clients to ensure that they are an appropriate match. If we have worked with a client before, and it was a successful pairing, DORS will continue to place us with that client to the extent possible. This consistency is important and can, in fact, be critical for both the interpreter and the consumers we serve.

However, as state agencies look to outside vendors for interpreters, it puts this service in jeopardy. Over the 19 years that I have worked for the state, I have seen a decrease in the number of hours we receive working for state agencies. This is cause for concern.

House Bill 6941 will help support our Deaf and Hard of Hearing community by requiring state agencies to look to the DORS interpreting unit first. If we, for whatever reason, cannot then provide a service, the agency can hire an outside vendor that provides certified Interpreters.

As further incentive, the cost of utilizing DORS services is actually lower than many other providers. DORS charges agencies a flat hourly rate that is less than many of the non-profit and for-profit companies. Unlike DORS, many of these other companies charge additional/higher hourly rates for short notice assignments or for disciplines of interpreting, such as work in the legal or medical venue.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.